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ABSTRACT

The concept of using good student writing to inspire more good student writing, of using a text to create the next year's text is a vital process that demonstrates DeKalb College's emphasis on individual student instruction and recognition. "The Polishing Cloth" is a collection of the best student essays from English composition, developmental studies, English as a second language, and other disciplines. Since its inception in 1984, it has evolved into a 250-page text, published annually and is sold at the student bookstore for $8. Any college can establish its own writing text by following a simple step-by-step procedure. Faculty members submit their students' best essays and then a faculty editorial board rates the papers. The use of such a publication in the classroom is limited only by the imagination of the students and the instructor. "The Polishing Cloth" is organized by classes ranging from developmental studies through the second quarter of composition to a few 200-level literary essays and interdisciplinary papers. The accessibility of the essays facilitates peer interaction with the more able students helping the less able. For the traditional classroom, "The Polishing Cloth" provides examples of narration, exposition, argumentation, literary analysis, models for topic and sentence outlines, and correct examples of MLA documentation for research papers. "The Polishing Cloth" is also an excellent reference text, which students can look to when in need of guidance about how a student paper should read. The permission to publish form and "The Polishing Cloth" rating sheet form for the 1995 edition are included. (TB)

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Sarah L. Larson

THE POLISHING CLOTH: STUDENT WRITING CREATES WRITING TEXT

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Sarah L. Larson

THE POLISHING CLOTH: STUDENT WRITING CREATES WRITING TEXT

The concept of using good student writing to inspire more good student writing, of using a text to create the next year's text is a vital process that demonstrates DeKalb College's emphasis on individual student instruction and recognition. *The Polishing Cloth* is a collection of the best student essays from English composition, developmental studies, English as a second language, and other disciplines, complementing the required rhetorics with accessible student models. In DeKalb College classrooms students help other students achieve excellence in writing.

THE HISTORY

The evolution of *The Polishing Cloth* provides an insight into the excitement and rewards of creating a composition textbook. In September 1984, Sarah Larson presented the idea of a freshman writing magazine to the joint English faculty through letters to freshman writers, colleagues, and high school teachers. The project was unanimously adopted. Four thousand copies of the forty-four page pilot magazine were printed by DeKalb College at a price of $1.50 each. A 1985 student evaluation of *The Polishing Cloth* revealed overwhelming approval of the text. The magazine has now evolved into a 250-page text published annually by Kendall Hunt, sold to the students by the college bookstore for approximately $8.00. Textbook authors have also discovered *The Polishing Cloth*. As a result, thousands of college students are reading DeKalb College essays published nationally in approximately 40,000 textbooks and 30,000 handbooks.

THE PROCESS

Any college can create its own writing text by following a simple step by step procedure. The faculty members are asked to choose and submit to the editorial board the best writing from their classes. The students must then sign a release form including a statement that the work is their own. The submission form contains the home address and telephone and social security numbers in order to provide correct information for the table of contents as well as for invitations to a reception honoring the students. Other information gathered includes the students' high schools and their locations, not only to provide articulation with the high schools but also to recognize the multi-cultural nature of the publication (figure 1).

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Since DeKalb College is a multi-campus institution, the editorial board consists of volunteers from all four campuses and from all levels of composition studies. Because each essay is rated by three instructors, a large editorial board is beneficial not only to alleviate the work load but also to assure diversity in content. A rotating two-year co-editorship guarantees continuity and invites innovation. The co-editors of the yearly publication then make the final selection from the highest rated essays. In addition to encouraging faculty to use the book in their classrooms, the editorial board at the beginning of the year offers faculty members a workshop on *The Polishing Cloth*, illustrating various ways to utilize the book in their own classrooms.

THE METHOD OF SELECTION

The primary purpose of the editorial board is reading and rating the hundreds of essays submitted by faculty throughout the college. Three members read each essay and then rate those acceptable A1 (excellent) through A3 (average) or U for those unacceptable. Comments are also included to justify the rating (figure 2). In order to assure objectivity, the board asks faculty to refrain from placing their names on the essays they submit. This anonymity also encourages risk taking which provides fresh, creative ideas. The co-editors of the yearly publication then make the final selection from the highest rated essays and attempt to publish a balance of the best essays from each course and as wide a selection of genre as possible.

THE CLASSROOM USE

The use of *The Polishing Cloth* in the classroom is limited only by the imagination of the students and the instructor. The magazine is organized by classes ranging from developmental studies through the second quarter of composition to a few 200-level literary essays and inter-disciplinary papers, providing an overview of the curriculum. The accessibility of the essays facilitates peer interaction with the more able students helping the less able. For the traditional classroom *The Polishing Cloth* provides examples of narration, exposition, argumentation, literary analyses, models for topic and sentence outlines, and correct examples of MLA documentation for research papers. *The Polishing Cloth* is also an excellent reference text. Since the student models follow the guidelines set down in DeKalb College's syllabi and illustrate the types of essays assigned, a student struggling with a writing assignment will find help in the form of a well-written student composition. In addition, the conflicting views on current issues

in the persuasive essays promote lively discussion and facilitate collaborative learning.

One reason the magazine has been successful in the classroom is that student essays are non-intimidating and easier to analyze and critique than those of established authors. Furthermore, the yearly publication of the magazine keeps it fresh and up-to-date, and students, inspired by the prospect of publication, polish their writing and visualize their audience. Also, *The Polishing Cloth* is in demand by students as preparation for exit exams. The Regents' essays and English 099 exit writing samples published in the magazine help to remove the mystery and fear from these assessment tools.

THE ADVANTAGES

The advantages of using *The Polishing Cloth* are not all student centered; they extend to faculty and administration as well. Faculty discover that the book cuts down on handouts and makes teaching easier, less lonely, and more fun. The administration finds that the publication promotes faculty development, provides articulation with high schools, facilitates orientation for new full-time and part-time faculty, and attracts favorable national publicity. Since the magazine supports itself and no college funds are used, any college can start a magazine and create its own very usable text.

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THE ADVANTAGES OF USING THE POLISHING CLOTH

Sarah Larson

Advantages for the student

1. Creates affordable, usable text.
2. Provides models of types of essays assigned.
3. Allows students to see entire English curriculum.
4. Stimulates and elevates all levels of writing.
5. Helps students successfully pass exit exams and Regents' tests.
6. Facilitates communication with classmates and instructor.
7. Motivates students to revise and polish essays for publication nation-wide.
8. Provides success stories for writers as they move through the curriculum.
9. Promotes lively discussion on burning issues.
10. Allows students to freely analyze and criticize accessible essays.
11. Facilitates peer interaction and collaborative learning.
12. Provides wide audience of classmates, high school students, professors, and other colleges and universities.

Advantages for the faculty

1. Makes teaching easier, more fun.
2. Builds faculty morale. (Faculty identify with student progress.)
3. Cuts down on hand-outs/workload.
4. Provides text that works.
5. Introduces new ideas to traditional English departments.
6. Helps students learn MLA documentation.
7. Makes teaching less lonely.
8. Reveals multiple examples of types of essays and research papers.
9. Creates emotional bonds between students/faculty.
10. Promotes group activities with teacher as observer.
11. Fleshes out department/division syllabus.
12. Supports teaching standards.

Advantages for the administration

1. Helps in orientation of new full-time and part-time faculty.
2. Promotes articulation with the high schools.
3. Creates vehicle for teaching workshops.
4. Fosters student retention.
5. Supports itself financially – no college funds used.
6. Provides recognition from other colleges/universities and authors/publishers.
7. Facilitates assessment/given to SACS visiting team.
8. Enhances college's learning environment.
9. Sponsors reception to honor students, parents, faculty.
10. Creates team efforts among faculty – not mandated or supervised by the administration.
11. Helps recruit students, faculty, and administrators.
12. Provides student scholarships from profits.

Fig. 1

PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE

THE POLISHING CLOTH

DeKalb College

NAME OF STUDENT_____

TELEPHONE (____) _____ SS# _____

ADDRESS_____
(number and street)

_____
(city) (state) (zip code)

ASSIGNMENT_____

TITLE OF THEME OR RESEARCH PAPER_____

_____

COURSE_____

HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDED_____

CITY_____ STATE_____

PERMISSION TO PUBLISH

THE POLISHING CLOTH, published by DeKalb College, has my permission to edit and publish all or part of my composition or research paper.

The student warrants that he/she is the author of the work and that any borrowed material is properly documented.

_____
Signature of Student Writer

Please staple this information/permission to publish form to your revised theme or research paper.

THE POLISHING CLOTH COMMITTEE
DeKalb College
North/Central/Gwinnett/South Campuses

Figure 2

***THE POLISHING CLOTH* RATING SHEET**
1995 EDITION

CATEGORY _____

Rate the paper as ACCEPTABLE or UNACCEPTABLE. Place your initials next to the rating. An "A1" is the highest rating.

A1	_____	_____	_____
A2	_____	_____	_____
A3	_____	_____	_____
U	_____	_____	_____

Comments:

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